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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT-ELECT JOSIPOVIC REVIEWS FOREIGN POLICY
PRIORITIES IN INITIAL MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Vivian S. Walker, Deputy Chief of Mission, for reasons 1
.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a January 21 meeting with Ambassador Foley, Croatian president-elect Ivo Josipovic reviewed the foreign policy priorities for his mandate. Beginning with an affirmation of Croatia's excellent relationship with the US as a NATO ally, Josipovic went on to express his appreciation for the "good will" and friendship that has characterized the "historic relationship" between the two countries. Among the foreign policy issues that will shape the opening months of his mandate, Josipovic highlighted Croatia's continued cooperation with ICTY and regional issues, including Croatia's relationship with Serbia and recent efforts to improve bilateral relations, as well as the situation in Bosnia. Josipovic acknowledged that all of these issues will have an impact on what is arguably Croatia's most important foreign policy objective, EU accession. Ambassador Foley expressed US appreciation for Croatia's contribution to ISAF and affirmed the USG's intention to support the security relationship and look for ways to be helpful as Croatia tackles the challenges of economic reform and improving its business climate. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During an evening meeting on January 19 in the president-elect's former campaign headquarters, Ambassador Foley sat down with Josipovic to lay the foundation for a working relationship, starting with a review of his key foreign policy priorities. Josipovic had just met with a key Croatian businessman and was on his way to a late evening dinner before departing for Zadar early the next morning for a working visit, returning to Zagreb for another round of meetings over the weekend. Clearly Josipovic, who claims to require very little sleep, is already in full transition mode. Beginning the dialogue with an affirmation of Croatia's excellent relationship with the US as a NATO ally, Josipovic went on to express his appreciation for the "good will" and friendship that has characterized the "historic relationship" between the two countries.

¶3. (C) Ambassador Foley began by reinforcing the need for Croatia's full and continued cooperation with the war crimes tribunal in the Hague. Foley confirmed that the British are now willing to acknowledge the progress the Croatians have made recently in the effort to locate or otherwise explain the absence of key documents requested by ICTY Special Prosecutor Serge Brammertz. However, Foley warned Josipovic that the Netherlands continues to share Brammertz's negative assessment of Croatia's cooperation, and he urged Josipovic to reach out personally to the Dutch leadership early on if they continued to block the opening of Chapter 23 in Croatia's EU accession process. Josipovic responded that as a lawyer and a professor of law, he has had a "long relationship" with the Hague. In fact, he noted that he had been criticized in the 1990s for his cooperation with the tribunal. However, he added, he was "not convinced of the quality of the trials in the Hague," and was concerned that "some indictees are still heroes" in their own countries.

Nevertheless, he felt strongly that the GoC had done everything in its power to identify the missing documents and said that it would be "illogical for Croatia to imperil its future in Europe" by failing to cooperate fully with the ICTY after having handed over General Gotovina for prosecution. He then wondered whether there was "a political reason behind all this," i.e. whether the Dutch (and previously British) position was being driven by geopolitics rather than by the letter of the law.

¶4. (C) Turning to bilateral relations with Serbia, Josipovic expressed his disappointment in President Tadic's failure to accept his personal invitation to his February 18 inauguration in Zagreb and over what he perceived as a lack of positive response from Belgrade to his public statements favoring improved relations. Ambassador Foley praised Josipovic for the positive tone and flexibility that he had publicly signaled toward resolution of the key open issues between the two countries and cautioned that Josipovic should not expect progress overnight. Josipovic responded by noting that he and Prime Minister Kosor plan to work together to address relations with Serbia and affirmed that "consolidation of the region is a priority for all" in the pursuit of peace, security and economic growth. He noted there were no shortages of regional concerns: "Serbia is putting itself into isolation over Kosovo," while Bosnia is "a disaster." He expressed particular concern for the fate of those Bosnian Croats who, rightly in his view, see the third entity as a threat to their political status in Bosnia. "They don't need a third entity; they need a functioning state....(in which) the three nations must share equal rights."

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¶5. (C) Ambassador Foley reiterated USG support for resolving these and other regional problems, noting that progress will be important in the context of Croatia's EU accession. Foley cited Slovenia's effort to block Croatia's EU accession over a long-standing border dispute as an example of the potential for unresolved issues to affect the accession process and added that European capitals will be keen to avoid a repeat of this experience, however unfair this may seem to Croatia. Josipovic responded by arguing that all border disputes in the region should be adjudicated by the International Court of Justice. Foley acknowledged that this may be a solution, but went on to highlight the dispute between Croatia and Serbia over refugee compensation as another complicating factor in the accession process. Here Josipovic demonstrated some emotion. Claiming that he did not see the connection between the refugee issue and EU accession, Josipovic said that Croatia did not intend to be "blackmailed by non members as well." "Everyone has the right to return," he said, adding that Croatian compensation for refugees unwilling to return was unthinkable unless Serbia was ready to compensate Croatia for war damages. Foley gently reinforced the point that while the EU did not support Serbia's maximalist position demanding compensation for refugees, nevertheless the absence of resolution of the refugee question could "complicate" the EU process. Josipovic did not dispute this but noted the importance of determining who (and how many) actually still met the legal definition of a refugee in Serbia.

¶6. (C) The meeting concluded with a brief discussion of President Obama's Afghanistan strategy in which Foley reiterated the USG's appreciation for Croatia's sustained and effective support of ISAF operations, and responded to Josipovic's question about the prospects for success. Foley affirmed the USG's intention to support the security relationship and offered to look for ways to be helpful as Croatia tackles the challenges of economic reform and the needed improvements in its business climate.

¶7. (C) Comment: An important first step in what we hope will be a regular dialogue on key bilateral and regional issues, this meeting demonstrated Josipovic's default mode as a legal

scholar and lawyer as well as his keen intelligence and command of English. His first recourse is to the law, and he retains enormous faith in the power of the law to distinguish right from wrong. The sometimes messy compromises required by diplomacy are new to him, as demonstrated by his reaction to the observation that the outcome of the refugee issue may be dictated by the demands of the accession process rather than according to a strict legal framework. Nevertheless, Josipovic's strong ethical bent and legal competence may prove helpful as Croatia strives to fight corruption at home and to complete its EU accession and stabilize relations with its neighbors.

FOLEY